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Name: Paul Clarke

Institution: University of Ulster. School of Architecture and Design.

Position: Architect. Lecturer in Architecture. Course Director for the Master of Architecture Programme

Notebooks and Narratives- The Secret Laboratory of the architect's sketchbook.

What lies hidden in the world of the architect's sketchbook and how is it used in both practice and teaching?

This paper unravels and researches the 'device' of the personal sketchbook -which is often undervalued or left unseen. In discussing what role the sketchbook has had historically in an architect's education, and how it has been perceived as a critical tool, it asks can it still be that indispensable aid amidst the complex representational field of computer modeling and Photoshop? Is it, that it is just simply a 'portable workspace'¹, which extends the studio beyond a fixed location to anywhere, or does it offer a unique medium for critical thinking and design?

Using contemporary case studies, the paper examines the contrasting approaches used in the sketchbooks of a range of national and International architect's (all of whom are currently working and teaching in Ireland). As many of these architects are also teachers the role sketchbook in studio teaching pedagogy is explored.

In the digital age can sketchbooks still hold their value as being fundamental to artistic, theoretical and architectural practice? We are familiar with the sketchbook as used by architects and artists on the 'Grand Tour' to record their journey and chart their 'education', but what of the everyday observations: of things seen and imagined, thoughts and notes, lists, spontaneous ideas, that all in a sense track experiences and ideas that architects capture and return to in their notebooks.

By aiming to catalogue, research and codify different approaches and working methods, a rich source of creativity and critical methodology is opened up which in turn aims to inform studio practice. This study reveals a rich continuity with how they have been used in the past -as storehouses of reflective thought and memory- which in themselves are fascinating, but more importantly opens up for research work that is often concealed in a drawer in the studio, a coat pocket or in the individual imagination of the architect. As such this paper and related research aims to make visible 'The Secret Laboratory'.

¹ Farthing S, Translation into blue lines. The Sketchbooks of Nicholas Grimshaw. 2009, Royal Academy of Arts London.